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Lucia A Keegan 01/18/2007 07:35:08 PM From DB/Inbox: Lucia A Keegan

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UNCLAS SENSITIVE PARIS 00168

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DISSEMINATION: UNESCOX  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 000168

SIPDIS

FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

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BAGHDAD PASS TO PAO PRESS OFFICER DEL CASTILLO

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [UNESCO](#) [SCUL](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: UNESCO CONFERENCE ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MEDIA  
DEVELOPMENT IN IRAQ

¶1. (SBU) UNESCO hosted a three-day international conference on the "Freedom of Expression and Media Development in Iraq" January 8-10 in Paris, bringing together over 300 participants, including 200 Iraqi journalists, some 20 members of the Iraqi parliament, government officials, and media owners to discuss the key concerns facing the country's media in the context of civil conflict in post-Saddam Iraq.

¶2. (SBU) At the close of the conference, a declaration was issued raising several points, including: the need to improve the safety of journalists and media professionals working in Iraq; the establishment of a national fund to provide financial support to the families of journalists killed in the line of duty; ensuring that crimes against journalists are investigated and do not go unpunished; the importance of Iraq's Communications and Media Commission functioning as an independent body; the need for journalists to form associations and regulate the profession themselves with professional standards and, finally, the importance of women and minorities in the media and their role in the reconstruction of Iraq.

¶3. (SBU) Despite getting off to a bad start, reportedly due to Turkey's refusal to permit the charter flight to over fly Turkish territory, and France's refusal to allow the plane to land in the middle of the night, the participants delved into several issues, including how to improve the safety of journalists and organizing funds to care for the families of assassinated media professionals.

¶4. (SBU) UNESCO's Director General Matsuura welcomed the group and praised them for their courage and professionalism. The other co-hosts for the event, Paolo Lembo, Director of the UNDP Office in Iraq, Mr. Siyamend Othman, CEO of the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission (CMC), and Japan's Ambassador to UNESCO, Seiichi Kondo,

also welcomed participants. The conference was paid for primarily by the CMC (which finances its operations from the media license fees it collects in Iraq), and a US\$30,000 gift from Japan.

¶15. (SBU) The US Mission was present to observe, as was Embassy Baghdad, which sent its Portfolio Press Officer, Daniel del Castillo. State Department officer, Michael Michener (DRL), was scheduled to speak, but did not attend. Just three or four UNESCO delegations sat in on the conference.

¶16. (SBU) The UNESCO conference provided the first opportunity for such a large group of Iraqi media professionals to meet together since the start of the war.

¶17. (SBU) As an observer to the conference, it was clear that many of the people in the room knew each other well, knew who the players were, what companies or organizations they represented, and what camp they represented. The divisions, while not clearly identifiable to an outsider, were, nonetheless, very apparent. The result was that every discussion, during the conference, seemed to have a second layer of meaning that was, unfortunately and literally, lost in translation, as the often-vocal reaction off of the podium to speakers was entirely in Arabic and not interpreted.

¶18. (SBU) Kurdish participants, both members of the Kurdish parliament and media professionals, made a point of always differentiating themselves from other participants in the group when speaking. Another Kurdish speaker suggested that conferences and training be held in Kurdistan, due to the relatively safe environment there. The speaker noted that since the demise of the Hussein regime, there are over 213 newspapers and 161 magazines now being printed in Kurdistan alone.

¶19. (SBU) Other attendees raised the fact that members of the Iraqi parliament were present, and should, according to many, not have a voice in formulating any declarations that should be coming only from media professionals.

¶110. (SBU) There were several rather heated discussions, at least by UNESCO standards, including an exchange when one participant suggested that the killing of journalists could be justified in part, as many worked for the Muhabarat secret services. The comment raised indignation throughout the room, and others stressed the need for journalists to be clearly identified as neutral observers. Others agreed that the problem of infiltration by secret services into the ranks of the media exists, but is not limited to Iraq, and in no case justified assassination. Another participant said that while we believe we are working for the greater national good, there are others who are seeking to undermine our efforts. There was also a call for common terminology for use in the media be developed, so terrorists are clearly defined from freedom fighters, for example.

¶111. (SBU) Others noted that Iraq's media is divided by lines based on affiliation with political parties, religious groups, civil organizations, and others claiming to be independent media. Interestingly, of the large group present, only six or seven hands when up when participants were asked if they represented "independent" media.

¶112. (SBU) There were many calls for transparency regarding ownership, and strict limits on monopolistic ownership of the media. As a part of this desire to be more independent, it was suggested that the CMC set up a "teleport" facility in Iraq enabling media companies to broadcast without having to use foreign satellite relay stations.

¶113. (SBU) Another interesting comment by one of the participants was in connection to the most recent training program of media professionals held in Amman, Jordan. According to the speaker, three different UN and UN agency-sponsored training programs, all concerning media in Iraq, were held in the same hotel with none of the meeting organizers aware of the fact that other UN groups were present. Others complained that the trainees knew more about the subjects than the trainers.

¶114. (SBU) Someone else raised the subject of donor countries, saying that donor countries are often more interested in playing out their political agendas than really interested in good results. The

speaker then asked the room whether anyone had refused monies for training outside of Iraq. He added that financial assistance for training should not be conditional.

¶15. (SBU) There were also several complaints about the squandering of funds. While no one spoke up about the cost of bringing together participants for this particular meeting in Paris, there were negative comments made about sending 10 media professionals outside of Iraq for training at a cost of US\$250,000. Several participants noted that Iraq's media professionals, technicians, and universities are fully competent to train media professionals in country, despite the fact that there seems to be a trend that implies that all "real" training must take place outside of Iraq.

¶16. (SBU) Another participant said that there is too heavy a focus on Baghdad, and that we must come to the understanding that Iraq exists and needs journalists outside of Baghdad.

¶17. (SBU) Finally, there were sessions held on economic independence and commercial sustainability, with speakers emphasizing the need for Iraq's media to become self-financing to lessen political pressures.

OLIVER